20001013199

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VIENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)	2. REPORT DATE	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED
	MAY 1980	final

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE
A Cultural Resource Survey, Highway 51 Bridge at Nonconnah Creek, Memphis,TN

5. FUNDING NUMBERS
96X3112

6. AUTHOR(S)
Jimmy D. McNeil

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)
in house

8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER

9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)
Dept. of the Army
Memphis District Corps of Engineers
B-202 Clifford Davis Federal Bldg.
Memphis, TN 38103

10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER
32

11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Unlimited

12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE

13. ABSTRACT *(Maximum 200 words)*

On 8 May 1980, an intensive cultural resources survey was conducted by the Environmental Resources Section of the US Army Corps of Enigineers ,Memphis District, along the left(south) descending bank of Nonconnah Creek at the Highway 51 bridge. A literature search and a pedestrian survey failed to locate any archaeological, historic or architectual sites within the proposed project area.

93 4 05 030

394981 93-07047

14. SUBJECT TERMS	15. NUMBER OF PAGES 7
	16. PRICE CODE

17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT

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(32)

A CULTURAL RESOURCES SURVEY, HIGHWAY 51 BRIDGE AT NONCONNAH CREEK, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

U. S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
MEMPHIS DISTRICT

JIMMY D. McNEIL
Archeologist

MAY, 1980

ABSTRACT

On 8 May 1980, an intensive cultural resources survey was conducted by the Environmental Resources Section of the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, Memphis District along the left (south) descending bank of Nonconnah Creek at the Highway 51 bridge. A literature search and a pedestrian survey failed to locate any archaeological, historic or architectural sites within the proposed project area. Thus, it is concluded that the proposed work will not have any impact on cultural resources.

Table of Contents

Plates

INTRODUCTION

During an earlier reconnaissance of the caving south bank of Nonconnah Creek upstream of the Highway 51 bridge charcoal lens, approximately one meter below ground surface, was discovered. However, no cultural materials were discovered in association with this lens.

The intensive survey conducted on 8 May, 1980, included a literature search, an on-the-ground test of the lens deposit area, and a careful surface search of the remainder of the exposed bank cut in the proposed work.

STUDY AREA AND PROJECT DESCRIPTION

At the request of the Tennessee Department of Transportation, the Corps of Engineers is proposing to undertake bank protection work along the left (south) descending bank of Nonconnah Creek upstream of the Highway 51 Bridge. Active bank caving is occurring along a 100-yard section directly upstream of and is threatening the south approach embankment of the bridge as well as an access roadway. The proposed project is located in the southern Memphis Metro area. Shelby County, Tennessee, on the south bank on Nonconnah Creek at the Highway 51 Bridge, as shown on Plates 1, 2, and 3.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

This portion of Nonconnah Creek basin is characterized by mild winters, relatively hot summers and evenly distributed precipitation. Annual precipitation is 49.7 inches with January the wettest month and October the dryest. Snow accounts for about ten percent of the total annual precipitation. The annual average temperature is 60°F (17°C) with July being the warmest month, 82°F (28°C), and January is the coldest, 42°F (6°C). The growing season stretches from mid-March to mid-November (Gilbert/Commonwealth 1979:8).

Lands adjacent to the proposed deposition site are predominantly cleared and idle and subject to extreme water level fluctuations. Water depth at the proposed site varies from several inches in the ripples to several feet directly beneath the bridge.

RESULTS OF THE RECORDS SEARCH

Gilbert/Commonwealth (1979:17-29) present a thorough review of what is known of the prehistoric and historic sites found along Nonconnah Creek. Their report was relied upon extensively in the production of this report. They reported no sites in the area of question. In April, 1980, the then COE Archaeologist, Carroll Kleinhans, did a reconnaissance of the caving south bank. At this time, she found the charcoal lens. Also the National Register of Historic Places was consulted. In no cases were any indications of associated cultural remains noted. This does not include the scattering of recent trash that covers a large percentage of the area.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The main concern about the charcoal lens was that it might have been caused by man. On 8 May, 1980, COE Archaeologist, Jimmy McNeil, spent approximately two (2) hours in the field testing the charcoal lens and surveying the remainder of the caving bank wall.

After locating the charcoal lens, the entire length of its vertical surface was trowled and all the material checked for cultural materials. After this, cuts were made above the charcoal lens, at both ends and near the center of the lens. At each cut the material above the lens was removed, the surface of the lens checked for structure and artifacts (stone, bone, ceramic), then the lens was cut-away and checked in thin layers. Finally the soil beneath the charcoal layer was checked. There was no indication that man had been associated with the charcoal. Following this the remainder of the bank was checked by trowling the vertical surface of the bank approximately every 30 meters.

This type of sampling strategy was chosen because of the excellent vertical exposure and because of the meter of deposition that overlay the charcoal deposit. More visual surface was exposed in this manner than by putting-down test pits from the horizontal ground surface.

The major limitation imposed by this method is not being able to determine the horizontal extent of the charcoal lens.

As no indications of man were found in assocation with the charcoal lens or the surrounding area it should be considered that this was a natural burn area and not the work of prehistoric peoples.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on an in-field cultural resource survey and a background records search, no evidence of archeological, historic, or architectural resources exists within the proposed deposition area. It is therefore concluded that the proposed bank protection work will not have any impact on cultural resources.

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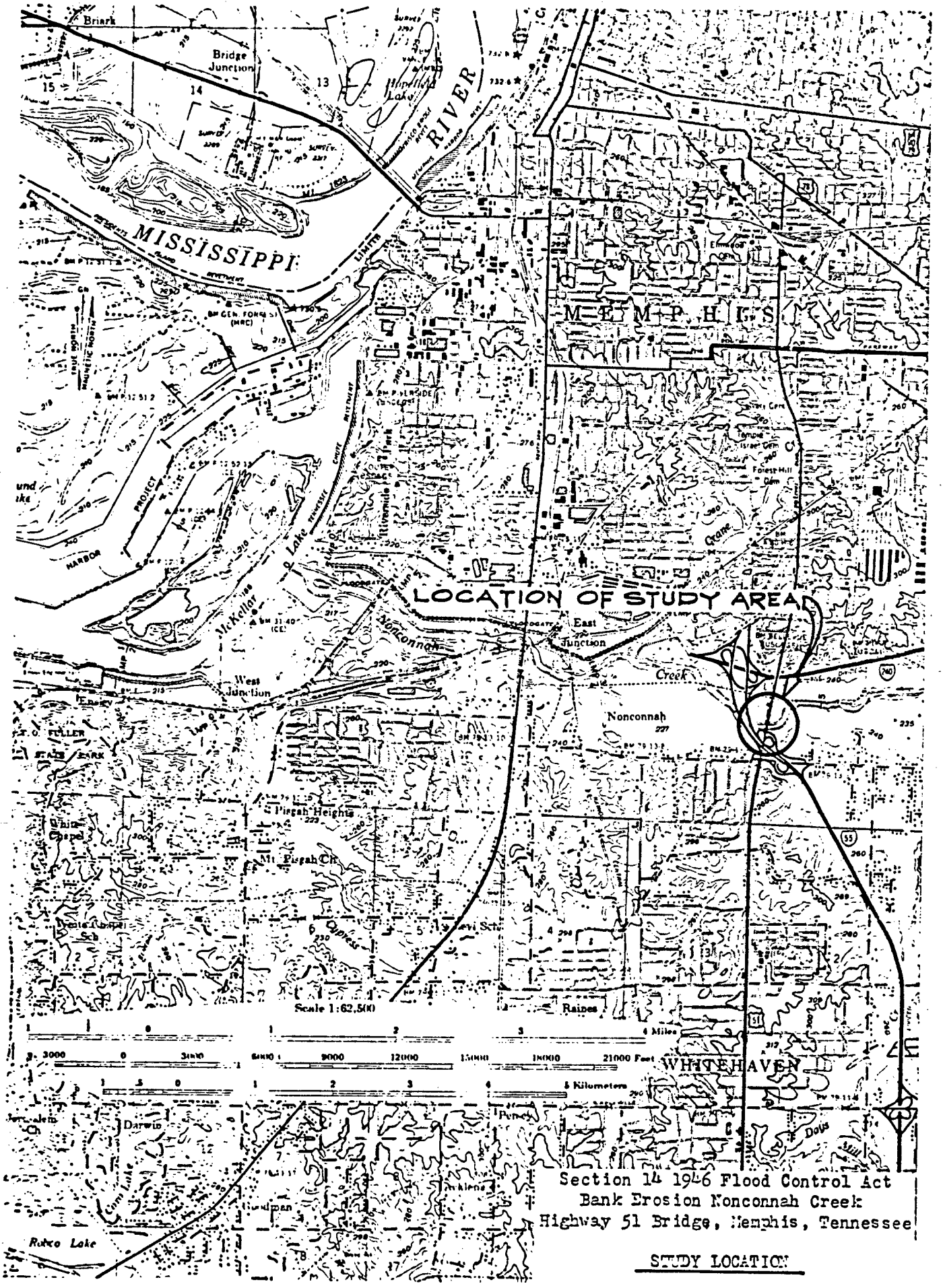
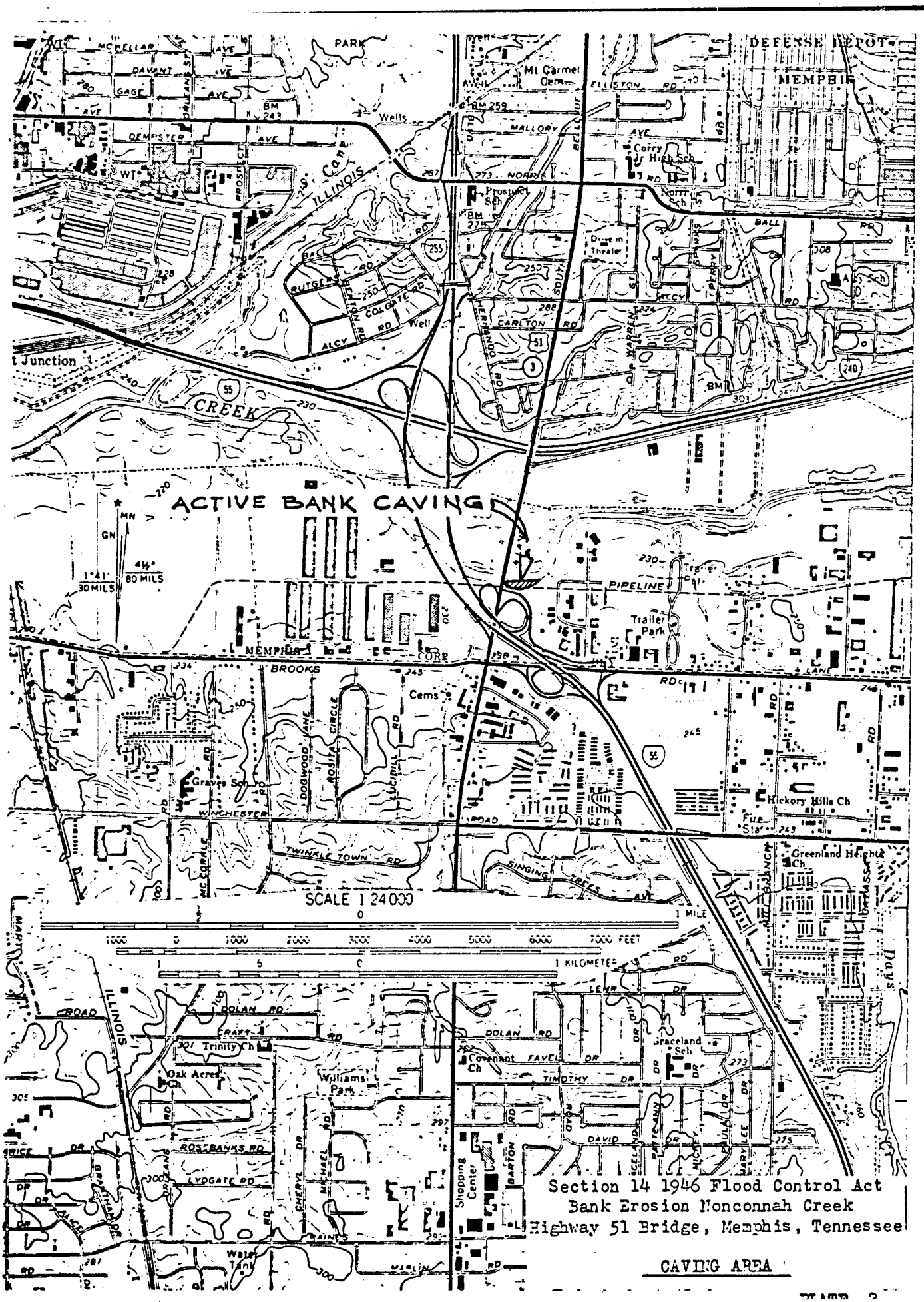


Section 14 1946 Flood Control Act
Bank Erosion Nonconnah Creek
Highway 51 Bridge, Memphis, Tennessee

STUDY LOCATION



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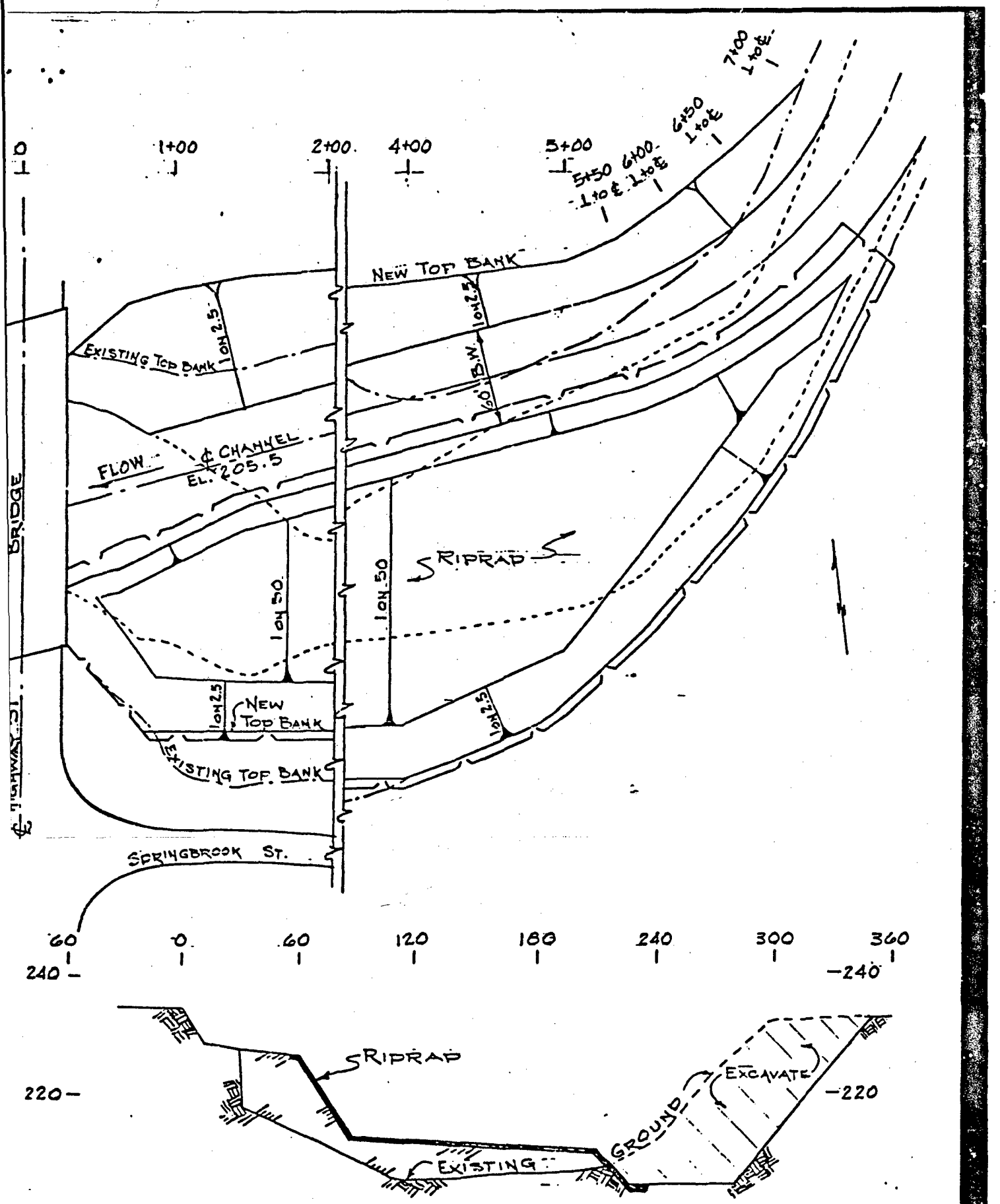

SECTION 14 1946 FLOOD CONTROL ACT.
BANK EROSION NONCONNAH CREEK
HIGHWAY 51 BRIDGE, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

PLATE 3